

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ALGIERS 002048

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/04/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [MO](#) [AG](#) [UN](#)

SUBJECT: MFA SECRETARY GENERAL SKEPTICAL ABOUT IMPROVING  
BILATERAL RELATIONS ABSENT CHANGE IN MOROCCAN POSITION

REF: A. WHITE HOUSE 301549Z SEPT 05

[1](#)B. ALGIERS 2042

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RICHARD W. ERDMAN: REASONS 1.4 (b) (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) MFA Secretary General Lamamra, in the context of Ambassador's delivery of the President's September 30 letter urging improved Moroccan-Algerian relations, showed little flexibility vis a vis Morocco, reinforcing our impression that the Algerian leadership has given up hope of any near-term progress with Morocco, is hunkering down for the long run, and believes little can change until Morocco alters its policies. Lamamra argued that Morocco was responsible for current problems, having rejected the Baker Plan, self-determination, and a referendum; disregarded UNSC resolutions on the Western Sahara; and blocked increased regional cooperation by declining to attend summit meetings in Algiers during Algeria's presidency of the Arab Maghreb Union. Lamamra said Algeria had done its part to improve relations with Morocco by facilitating the August prisoner release by the Polisario, agreeing to send PM Ouyahia to Rabat, and sending to Rabat as ambassador presidential Chief of Staff Belkheir, a key senior figure close to Bouteflika known to favor improved bilateral relations.

[1](#)2. (C) Ambassador repeatedly stressed our hope that both sides would work for better communication and improved relations in a constructive and open spirit; urged acceptance of Moroccan FM Benaissa's invitation to FM Bedjaoui to visit Rabat; and cautioned that declining an invitation to dialogue -- which was always Algeria's advice to us and others when there were important differences -- would cast Algeria as the obstacle to improved relations. Arguing at first that the problem was not communication but what the two sides would have to say to each other, Lamamra in the end stopped short of saying the Moroccan invitation would be rejected, suggesting instead that a decision would await Belkheir's arrival in Rabat and subsequent recommendation. (End Summary)

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE DELIVERED

[1](#)3. (C) Ambassador, accompanied by PolEc Chief, delivered to MFA Secretary General Lamamra October 3 the text of President Bush's message to President Bouteflika urging renewed efforts to improve Moroccan-Algerian relations. Allowing Lamamra time to read the message, Ambassador explained that the President's basic message was our hope that both sides would build on the August POW release, to improve relations and create a better regional climate conducive to settlement of the Western Sahara issue. Lamamra responded that while it was for President Bouteflika to respond to President Bush, he could say that Algeria hoped for deepened bilateral relations with the United States, improved relations with Morocco, and increased regional cooperation. He agreed with the Ambassador's comment that in many ways, the Moroccan and Algerian people -- who shared a common culture, ethnicity, religion, dialect, music, cuisine, and history -- were ahead of their governments.

MOROCCO'S BEHAVIOR MAKES PROGRESS ON  
BILATERAL AND REGIONAL ISSUES MORE DIFFICULT

[1](#)4. (C) On the personal level, Lamamra said, the two peoples traded, visited, or vacationed in each other's country. He himself enjoyed good personal relations with FM Benaissa from their days together as ambassadors in Washington, where their daughters attended the same school, were close friends, and slept over at each other's houses. The problem was at the official level, where Morocco pursued policies that prevented cooperation. While Algeria wished to keep the Western Sahara issue out of the bilateral context, as a practical matter, Morocco's unhelpful attitudes and behavior, such as the abrupt cancellation of the Prime Minister's planned visit to Rabat in June, inevitably created an atmosphere which made progress on other bilateral and regional issues more difficult. Lamamra also noted in passing, clearly referring to Morocco's stepped up criticisms following the August POW release, that Morocco had not exactly responded positively with a gesture of its own.

#### MOROCCO'S TO BLAME

15. (C) Lamamra briefly recounted Algeria's version of developments in Moroccan-Algerian relations since Morocco's occupation of the Western Sahara in 1975, predictably and inaccurately placing all the blame on Morocco. He noted that relations had been broken off following Morocco's move into the Western Sahara in 1975; that presidential Chief of Staff Belkheir had helped negotiate the restoration of diplomatic ties between the two countries in 1988; that Morocco had accepted the principle of self-determination and agreed to a referendum; that Morocco blocked progress toward greater regional cooperation in the mid-1990s by refusing to attend Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) meetings during Algeria's presidency of that organization; and that it was Morocco that had rejected Baker, self-determination, and a referendum. More recently, Morocco had abruptly canceled Prime Minister Ouyahia's visit to Rabat in June, setting back efforts to move the bilateral process forward. It was also unfortunate, Lamamra added, that Morocco always wanted to discuss a solution to the Western Sahara dispute with Algeria, since the issues requiring discussion were not between Morocco and Algeria but between Morocco and the Polisario.

#### ALGERIA HAS MADE NUMEROUS GESTURES, LAMAMRA ARGUES

16. (C) By contrast, Lamamra claimed that Algeria consistently supported UN Security Resolutions and the principle of self-determination for the Sahrawi people -- a right that Algerians had demanded for themselves at the time of their independence and could hardly deny the Sahrawis. Algeria had also supported the Baker Plan. Moreover, it had demonstrated its good intentions and readiness to move forward by: 1) lifting Algeria's visa requirement following Mohammed VI's visit for the Arab League Summit in March; 2) agreeing to PM Ouyahia's visit to Rabat to discuss the way forward in bilateral relations (i.e., toward the reopening of the borders); 3) facilitating Polisario's release of the 404 Moroccan prisoners in August; and 4) naming Belkheir, a top official close to President Bouteflika known as an advocate of Moroccan-Algerian cooperation, as ambassador to Rabat. Lamamra also commented that UNSYG Kofi Anan's appointment of Personal Envoy Van Walsum and Special Envoy Bastagli was a positive development and that Algeria looked forward to working with them during their visits to the region.

#### LAMAMRA COOL ON FOREIGN MINISTER ACCEPTING FM BENAÏSSA'S INVITATION

17. (C) Ambassador said we welcomed the positive steps Algeria had taken and agreed that sending Belkheir to Rabat as ambassador could help improve communication. We believed the current impasse between Morocco and Algeria helped no one and it was in both sides' interest to build on the prisoner release to improve relations and establish better communication. The latter was a serious problem, Ambassador said, and could only be fixed through increased dialogue. In this regard, Ambassador asked about FM Benaïssa's recent invitation to FM Bedjaoui to come to Rabat, noting the usefulness of high level dialogue in getting things back on track. Lamamra claimed there was not a problem of communication. The problem was Morocco's backtracking from previous positions and its efforts to unilaterally impose Moroccan sovereignty on the Western Sahara. What was important was not just a dialogue but what would be said in a dialogue. Until Morocco adjusted its behavior and attitudes, it was difficult to see what could be achieved by accepting the Benaïssa invitation.

#### AMBASSADOR PUSHES BACK

18. (C) Ambassador vigorously disagreed, arguing that both sides in fact repeatedly misread one another. For example, the King's well-intended announcement in August 2004 lifting the visa requirement was poorly received because the GOA had not been notified in advance and was thus suspicious. Lamamra countered that Benaïssa had been in Algiers the week before and had said nothing about this move, thus proving that it was in fact "a political move." Ambassador said he understood the King had personally taken this decision without consulting his advisers and thus it was very likely Benaïssa himself had not been aware. Another example of miscommunication was the King's sudden cancellation of the Ouyahia visit because Algerian intentions to use that visit to move concretely toward a reopening of the border were not sufficiently understood in Rabat.

19. (C) Improved dialogue and communication would help avoid such misunderstandings. We understood there were important differences over the Western Sahara, Ambassador suggested, but the two sides should set them aside, let them be dealt with in a UN framework, and seek improved relations and

dialogue that would create a regional climate more conducive to a Western Sahara settlement. Returning to Morocco's invitation to FM Bedjaoui, Ambassador cautioned that rightly or wrongly, declining an invitation to dialogue -- which was always Algeria's advice to us and others when there were differences -- would give the impression that Algeria, not Morocco, was the obstacle to improved relations. Taking the point and clearly keeping open the option of accepting the invitation, Lamamra said that before taking a decision they would wait for Belkheir to be on the ground and make a recommendation.

ERDMAN